

AN
INAUGURAL ADDRESS,
DELIVERED IN THE THEATRE
OF THE
ISLINGTON LITERARY AND SCIENTIFIC
SOCIETY,

On the Opening of the new Building.

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 16, 1837.

BY
J. J. J. SUDLOW, Esq.,
ONE OF THE VICE-PRESIDENTS.

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TO THE
PRESIDENT AND MEMBERS
OF THE
ISLINGTON LITERARY AND SCIENTIFIC SOCIETY,
THIS ADDRESS,
DELIVERED, AND AFTERWARDS PRINTED,
AT THE REQUEST
OF
THE COMMITTEE OF MANAGEMENT,
IS RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED.

INAUGURAL ADDRESS.

IF I had consulted my own feelings, without adverting to any other considerations, I should at once have declined the arduous although honorable task of addressing you from this place, and upon this occasion. Prone from natural disposition to retirement rather than to public display—belonging to a profession whose studies and active pursuits afford little leisure for the investigations of general science, or the cultivation of elegant literature—surrounded with other engagements, which allowed but a scanty measure of time for preparation, it would have relieved me from no small degree of embarrassment, if the duty had fallen upon some one more competent to discharge it. The avocations of our respected President, to whom it almost naturally belonged, having forbidden this, the undertaking was pressed upon me, with so much of partial and friendly

earnestness, that, holding as I do an important station in this Society, and therefore fairly called upon to support the great objects for which it was formed, I felt myself unable to refuse the office ; cheered and encouraged, at the same time, by the conviction, that however imperfect and inadequate my remarks, I might securely repose upon the indulgence and the candour of my audience.

Allow me, then, in the first place, to congratulate you upon the successful result of those united efforts which have at length seated the Literary and Scientific Society of Islington under their own roof-tree. It is not, simply, that we have a building we can call our own that entitles us to indulge in something of a triumphant feeling ; but the fact gives such evidence of our growing prosperity—of the increasing value attached to the principles we have in view—it holds out such prospects of more extended usefulness to ourselves and our children, if not to remoter times—it promises, we may perhaps add, so much of public advantage, that some exultation on such an occasion as the present is natural, and may be allowed.

But we cannot fully appreciate our present

eminence without a glance backward upon our origin. The plan of this Association was first projected by a few individuals, lovers of science and literature, and who were desirous that the pleasures and advantages of which they themselves were sensible, should be more effectually promoted and shared by a wider circle. At that period such a scheme was altogether new in this neighbourhood—it was doubtful how the suggestion would be received—the pulse of opinion, so to speak, was to be felt—we had to fathom with line and lead every inch of our way. Those gentlemen will remember, who shared them with me, the difficulties of that time—the opposition encountered—the discouragements to be overcome—the misapprehensions continually rising up—as often to be met and explained away—the days and nights of watchful attention, laborious indeed, yet cheerfully endured. To witness the dawn of success gradually, but certainly, advancing to brightness—the obscure spring, at first giving forth its waters reluctantly—at length gushing into a noble river; this was our reward then, now further enhanced and consummated by the unalloyed pleasure of seeing our fellow-members and their friends assembled together in this newly-raised building, as

in a temple dedicated to the cultivation of the liberal arts, to the encouragement of science, and the diffusion of sound learning.

If I were called upon to state what is the main object of this and similar institutions, I should venture to reply—"the augmentation of human happiness, usefulness, and virtue by the spread of knowledge." Is this definition too ambitious? It was said by Dean Swift, that he who makes two blades of grass grow where only one grew before, deserves to be reckoned among the benefactors of mankind. Was that celebrated author correct in awarding exalted praise merely to an increased production of the means by which animal life is sustained? How much more is the species benefited by the enlargement of mind--the inculcation of right ends to be attained by right means--the weeding from the human breast misleading prejudices and false fears--planting in their stead the seeds of genuine science--and providing for each faculty its adequate employment and gratification! And then, have we not the evidence of ancient times and of our own to the humanizing effect of liberal studies—to their tendency, when properly directed, and guided always by the light of religious truth, to foster the virtues that gladden the domestic circle,

increase individual usefulness, and add to the sum of public prosperity ?

The desire of knowledge is one of those principles which are rooted in the nature of man. Look at the child listening spell-bound to the nursery tale—the youth following the track of the adventurous mariner on his voyage “to descry new lands”—sharing in fancy his perils, his escapes, the joys of discovery. It is the same feeling, choosing different paths, indeed, for its exertion, which in riper years dwells upon the spirit-stirring drama and the lofty epic—revels in the romance of history—pries into the revolutions of distant planets—explores the wonderful laws of the material universe—descends into the mine, to trace the story of our globe among the hieroglyphics of her varied strata.

And how wisely is all this ordered ! The paths of learning are proverbially steep and rugged, and to tread them requires a determined footstep and untiring resolution. Truths of every kind, especially those connected with the physical world, are not obvious to an indolent search : they are frequently veiled in deepest obscurity—often en-

tangled with appearances which look like, but are not, truths; and it requires much patient labour—careful, I had almost said timid, inquiry—an extensive accumulation of facts—and, afterwards, a wise and cautious course of inductive reasoning upon them, before any thing can be confidently pronounced concerning the laws of nature, or any substantial verity can be educed from the collected phenomena. It was, therefore, needful that some powerful stimulus should be supplied to overcome our natural reluctance to labour; and it is found in that restless curiosity after what is new and wonderful, by which we are almost instinctively urged onward in the career of invention and discovery.

Now, if this principle be implanted so powerfully in our nature, how important to give it a right direction: in other words, to lead it into those studies which enlighten as well as please; and, while they amuse the imagination, serve to invigorate the reason and purify the taste! And never, surely, in any period of our annals was it more needful to give the public mind a healthful bias than in our own day. That the *schoolmaster is abroad*, is a phrase which, because it has some

ludicrous associations connected with it, is often mentioned only to excite a smile, and the serious import of the truth is too frequently lost in the laughable images which the fancy conjures up. But to those who look beyond the surface, there is matter in it for much serious reflection. It may, perhaps, be scarcely too much to assert, that since the awakening of intellect after the long slumbers of the dark ages, there never has been a period when the mental faculties were spurred into so much of general activity as in these times : whether the spring of the human mind, repressed by those fearful and portentous wars—those seasons of national difficulty and hazard, which followed the outburst of the French revolution, and now, relieved from the pressure, exerts its powers with threefold force ; or whether the efforts to promote the education of the people made by men of great talents and energy have roused the dormant spirit, or from whatever other cause, it is not perhaps needful here to inquire ; but it is a simple and obvious fact, that the thirst for knowledge, instead of being confined to the few, is felt by all classes. No longer cloistered in colleges, the language of science has reached the humblest dwellings. Many of the profound truths which, when they fell from

the lips of Newton, were comprehended by only a narrow circle of cotemporaries, are now often embodied in the lectures of a mechanics' institute, and not merely uttered there, but understood. Philosophy may be said to have left the academic garden, and visited the busy haunts of common men—the streets and workshops of towns and cities. The isoteric has become exoteric—the cabalistic revealed; and that busy and inquiring age seems almost to be realized which met the prophetic eye of Milton, and which he has pourtrayed in the language, though not in the measure, of a sublime poetry :—

“Methinks I see in my mind a noble and puissant nation rousing herself like a strong man after sleep, and shaking her invincible locks; methinks I see her muing her mighty youth, and kindling her undazzled eyes at the full mid-day beam; purging and unscaling her long-abused sight at the fountain itself of heavenly radiance*.”

And here let us contrast, for an instant, the sort of general information that existed in this

* Areopagitica—Speech for the Liberty of unlicensed Printing.—*Milton's Prose Works*, vol. i, p. 324.

country about the commencement of the last century with the state of things which I have just described. At that time, how few, even among the upper classes, could boast of learning; while the great majority of both sexes were notoriously deficient in the commonest elements of scholarship. Addison, scarcely in jest, asserted that until his *Spectator* came out in the morning, the beaux were literally unfurnished with ideas to carry them through the day; and of the ladies of the same period, it has been said, rather uncourtously, but I am afraid with considerable truth, that they could spell no word of above three syllables, and were acquainted with no science but that of making tapestry. Perhaps the truest, certainly the most graphic, record of the manners and habits of those times is to be found in such periodical essays as the *Tatler*, once in so much repute, now so undeservedly banished from the reading-desk. The *Guardian*, in one of his papers, describes a family of title as singularly and commendably learned, because they intermingled the reading of a superficial treatise of astronomy—and that, too, a translation from the French—with the cares of cookery.

“I was mightily pleased,” he says, “the other day, to find them all busy in preserving several fruits of the season, with the Sparkler in the midst of them, reading over the ‘Plurality of Worlds.’ It was very entertaining to me, to see them dividing their speculations between jellies and stars, and making a sudden transition from the sun to an apricot, or from the Copernican system to the figure of a cheesecake.”

Such was the case with the superior ranks of society : the lower grades were grossly ignorant ; and the notion of infusing a taste for reading among the peasantry, or of mathematical science among the mechanics of the reign of Queen Anne, would have been laughed down as the wild dream of an insane speculator. Even Locke, liberal as were his ideas, and hopeful as he was of the capacity and progress of the human race, confessed that knowledge and science were only for those who were at ease and leisure.

I believe there are persons who look upon the present eagerness for improvement with some propensity to ridicule it—who speak of the “march

of intellect" with disdain, and are always ready with the poet's sarcasm against "a little learning." There is, indeed, very little learning—and less wisdom, and still less philanthropy—in the temper of mind which can sneer at changes so important as to affect, either advantageously or injuriously, the happiness of millions. No one who is competent to appreciate the value of learning but must wish the scorned "little" were in every case *more*. Yet even a little, if it be true learning, is better than none:—it *must* be valuable, not only in itself, but as the first and essential step to higher attainments. There are other persons, again, who view the advance of knowledge with alarm. They foresee in it the seeds of disorder—a confusion of ranks—society dislocated—the elements of revolution let loose; and they fear, moreover, that in probing the secrets of creation, the Almighty and beneficent Creator may be shrouded and forgotten behind the veil of secondary causes. But unless I greatly mistake, crime may be looked for as the offspring of darkness rather than light—of ignorance, not of knowledge; and popular disturbances owe, in a considerable degree, their origin, and often savage results, not to education, but to an ill-informed mind: witness those short-sighted

and wicked attempts to better the manufacturer's and labourer's condition—the destruction of machinery, and the incendiary fires which have disgraced our country. No doubt, a spirit of revenge occasionally mingled with the dominant motive ; but can any one hesitate to say, that the deluded men aimed chiefly and most irrationally at raising the value of their own labour by destroying the engines through which that labour had been either partially or entirely superseded, and that, had they possessed even the elements of political economy, they must have known such an object to be altogether impracticable and absurd ? And then, with regard to the deprecated evil (much indeed to be deprecated if real !)—that the pursuits of philosophy have a tendency towards atheism—this, if it be true at all, can only be predicated of a spurious and superficial knowledge ; of those shallow and erroneous notions which uneducated men are apt to imbibe as they pass onward in life, and which it is the very business of education to banish from the world. It would, indeed, be singular and strange, if an investigation of the laws of nature—the course of Providence, observed in the history of nations and individuals—the structure of man in the mechanism of his body, and,

above all, in the wide-reaching and analytical powers of his mind—if a survey of all these wonders served only to induce a disbelief of the existence and attributes of their great Author—of man’s “Guide, Original, and End.” But this is no new charge: it is a libel of long standing—often repeated—as often refuted. It has been tried, too, and sentence has been pronounced upon it, by one who had surveyed the field of knowledge with an acuter eye, a more learned and settled judgment, than were ever perhaps vouchsafed before to any of the sons of men. Lord Bacon, in his *Treatise on the Advancement of Learning**, says—

“When the second causes, which are next unto the senses, do offer themselves to the mind of man, if it dwell and stay there, it may induce some oblivion of the highest cause; but when a man passeth on further, and seeth the dependence of causes and the works of Providence, then, according to the allegory of the poets, he will easily believe that the highest link of nature’s chain must needs be tied to the foot of Jupiter’s chair.”

But let us suppose that the spirit of inquiry

* Bacon’s Works, vol. i, p. 10, 8vo edit. 1803.

now abroad were a *problematical* benefit, and it were possible, by some Gothic crusade against knowledge, to bow it down. How momentary the success! how short-lived the triumph!—the re-action how calamitous! You might sheer the locks, and put out the eyes, but the giant's strength would return; and his recovered energy would then be terrible, for it would be *blind*, and therefore destructive, power. Let no man, however, deceive himself on this subject: it is *not* possible to suppress the spirit which has gone forth. You might as well attempt to turn back the rising tide as it dashes upward to the shore, or stay the avalanche in its fall.

But the eager pursuit after knowledge which we cannot arrest, it may be possible, nevertheless, to guide, and make it subservient to the production of *good* instead of *evil*. If knowledge of some kind must be had, they are the true patriots who bend their exertions to the supply of genuine and accurate knowledge. Hence arises the immense importance of sound education, and of institutions for the dissemination of it, whether they wear the names of schools and colleges, or the more modest and more modern titles of Literary Societies

and Mechanics' Institutes : hence, too, arises the necessity for infusing a wholesome spirit into our literature and science, and of multiplying and keeping untainted those channels by which information is conveyed to the general mind of the country.

Besides the charge brought against philosophy of its supposed anti-religious tendency, there is another objection which, however, I believe is nearly obsolete. It existed among a class of men to whom it was very difficult to recommend erudition of any kind, on account of their opinion of its *inutility*. They saw no profit in any occupation of time that did not immediately bring with it *food and raiment* ; and they considered ordinary and uneducated intellects as best fitted to produce those substantial and comfortable results. Such men would have viewed with a feeling very much allied to contempt a Newton pondering the problems of the *Principia*—a Franklin engaged with his pith balls and electrical apparatus—a Davy pursuing his course of experiment which ended in the safety lamp—or a Watt occupied in bringing to perfection that engine which seems almost designed to revolutionize the world. Pro-

bably they would have deemed the philosophers thus meditating, and thus delving for truth, as idly employed as children gathering pebbles on the sea shore, or blowing bubbles, to sparkle for a moment in the sunbeam, and then expire. But incompetent as these condemners of science might be to fathom an abstruse principle, or to foresee the mighty result while still wrapped in its germ, they are, at least, qualified to comprehend their importance when they are, at length, developed in those wonderful contrivances by which labour is abridged, wealth multiplied, and the accommodations of every-day life created and secured. How, indeed, could they deny the merits of the thoughtful inventor, who view the spinning machine performing “like a thing of life,” its accumulated operations—or see the miner descend fearlessly into an atmosphere charged with death—or who walk through streets illuminated by a brilliant gas—or travel over the country with the swiftness of an eagle’s wing?

These are, indeed, some striking instances to shew how knowledge confers power and ministers to well-being; but there is another benefit which she has bestowed, often overlooked, but

which I am not disposed to rank last in the train of her many blessings. I mean that of having banished from the mind those baseless alarms which, in former times, owing to an imperfect and immature state of science, haunted the imagination and disturbed the comfort of mankind. What has become of judicial astrology, which once held so many, even strong minds, in its fetters? Where are now the ghost-infested houses, the witches and spectres at which our ancestors grew pale? or, lower still, where the palpitations of heart, if the death-watch ticked, or the salt were spilt, or the knife and fork happened to be laid across? These and a much longer and darker catalogue of ill-omens, and superstitions and vain fears, have fled: the day has risen, and they are gone; or if some of them still linger, it is only on the borders of that twilight which the ascending sun is preparing to scatter and disperse. And let it be well remarked, that these causeless apprehensions were not confined to the ignorant and uneducated; they were shared by scholars—they disturbed the seats of justice—they influenced the legislation of the senate. If any one doubt this, I have but to refer him to the statute of James the First “against conjuration and dealing with evil and

wicked spirits*”—to the trial for witchcraft in 1665, at which, it is sad to think, Sir Matthew Hale presided. I would then refer him to the philosophical works of the learned Dr. Henry More, the Platonist, a folio published about the middle of the 17th century, where he will find a list of charms and magical cures, and apparitions, detailed, believed, and reasoned upon with a gravity which, if it were not melancholy, would be ridiculous. How truly healthy and refreshing is the change! One can scarcely take up a modern book without gathering some hint that forcibly reminds us how superior to the past generation, in the calmness and courage conferred by true science, is that in which we live: take an instance from Dr. Arnott's *Elements of Physics*:—

“It happened,” says that ingenious author, “it happened once, on board a ship sailing on the coast of Brazil, one hundred miles from land, that the persons walking on deck, when passing a particular spot, always heard very distinctly the sound of bells, varying as in human rejoicings. All on board came to listen, and were convinced; but the phenomenon was mysterious and inexplicable.”

* 2 Jac. 1, ch. xii.

Now, suppose for a moment, that this circumstance had occurred a century or two back: what scope here for superstitious fancy to do her work—what room for fearful forebodings—what an arena for shapes “that syllable mens’ names”—what plausible reason for tracing these strange sounds to the exultation of fiends over approaching shipwreck and death! But in the instance just mentioned, no one thought of attributing the merry peal to unearthly agents—the observers waited, in the spirit of a better philosophy, after the *fact*, to learn the cause—and the solution came.

“Months afterwards,” proceeds Dr. Arnott, “it was ascertained, that at the time of observation, the bells of the city of St. Salvador, on the Brazilian coast, had been ringing on the occasion of a festival: their sound, therefore, favoured by a gentle wind, had travelled over one hundred miles of smooth water, and had been brought to a focus by the sail in the particular situation on the deck where it was listened to*.”

Such is the triumph of knowledge, derived from that profounder search into natural causes and

* Elements of Physics, vol. i, p. 505.

effects, which distinguishes the philosophy of recent days. Your goblin, indeed, is the progeny of ignorance—it lurks and gibbers in darkness; and the surest method of laying a ghost is to let in the sunbeams.

But although *science* may have succeeded in wringing a slow and forced homage from many reluctant votaries, there still linger behind in the march of civilization some who cannot be brought to acknowledge the true value of literature. Euclid and Smeaton they hold in high estimation; but refuse allegiance to Homer, Beaumont and Fletcher, and Clarendon. I do not mean to say, there are many in modern times who are quite prepared to approve the edict of Mahomet, which made the study of the liberal arts a sort of capital felony—or to vindicate the caliph who burnt the Alexandrian library, or who consider as good logic the famous syllogism by which he justified that mighty conflagration; but still there are multitudes so carried away by the utilities of mechanical philosophy, that they would feel little emotion if the unwinding papyri of Herculaneum were to reveal the lost decades of Livy, or even if another epic from the pen of Milton should chance

to be discovered among the dusty records of our own state papers; and this simply, because their minds are unimpressed with the conviction that what are called “literary pursuits” really answer any better purpose than amusement for the idle.

It is, indeed, a subject which has often been debated, and is still undetermined, whether the exact sciences, or logical, ethical, and classical studies, are best adapted to qualify the mind for deciding rightly those many questions that perpetually spring up in the affairs of life. Locke has given the palm to the mathematics, while Gibbon condemns demonstrative reasoning as tending to destroy the capacity for judging of moral evidence. Subsequent writers have taken up this vexed question, and treated it according to their own observation or personal experience; but a satisfactory conclusion cannot be soon expected, seeing how difficult it is, in inquiries that concern the mind, accurately to assign particular accessions of power and ability to one mode of discipline rather than to another.

This is not the place, at least this is not the occasion, for entering upon the general argument

with the fulness which it well deserves; otherwise it would not be difficult, perhaps, to shew that truth, as usual, lies between the combatants; and that as, on the one hand, geometry and algebra must be admitted to be all-important in fixing the attention and habituating the mind to patient inquiry and a severe and close demonstration, so, on the other, it must equally be conceded that the judgment, which deals with the subjects of everyday life, is most improved by being most exercised, not where certainty, but where probability is the test. Allowing, therefore, to the advocates of the physical and mathematical sciences the unquestionable merits of their favourite pursuits, let them not deny that the study of logic and rhetoric, and a sedulous and accurate perusal of those admirable specimens of poetry and argument, history and eloquence, which the literary annals, even of our own country, can exhibit, may have a considerable effect in improving the reasoning powers, as, in giving fertility to the imagination and purity to the taste, they are beyond all controversy superior. From such a communion with genius as I have alluded to, the student could scarcely retire but with faculties sharpened to detect error—elevated to admire and imitate what-

ever in character is just, beneficent, and patriotic—qualified to appreciate the best models of successful art—and with a store of entertainment and reflection opened to him, which would prove, in future years, a refuge from the temptations that beset idleness, and a useful means of filling up those moments of leisure that must frequently occur in the lives even of the busiest. “These studies,” indeed, to adopt the sentiment of the Roman orator, often repeated, yet never trite—as true now as it was nineteen centuries ago when he first uttered it, “these studies are the nourishment of youth, the delight of age, the ornament of prosperous life, the solace and refuge of adversity, the companion of our wanderings, of our rural seclusion, of our wakeful nights.”

If, then, science and literature must be allowed to contribute so emphatically to the use, the ornament, the pleasures, and the success of life—if there be confessedly a wide-spreading eagerness to inquire and know, and to make one stage of inquiry and knowledge subservient to still further progress—and if it thence becomes so material to guide this energy through right channels to salutary objects, it might seem to require little

more to be said in recommendation of those institutions, now springing up on every side, which supply books, and living instructors, and the facilities of philosophical research. But with the growth of literary and scientific societies there appears to me to have arisen, in some quarters at least, a fastidious and captious spirit, which though it cannot, indeed, extinguish, endeavours to depreciate them, and may possibly serve for awhile to retard their establishment. To what end, it is said, this stir about instruction? What fruits has it produced? Chatterton and Burns, the Franklins and the Arkwrights, arose without the aid of mechanics' institutes. Point out the inventions and works which owe their origin to public lectures. To all this it might fairly be replied, that those illustrious men, wanting, as they did too often, the means of study and experiment, would never have been the advocates of such objections; that *they* would never have depreciated institutions, the very purpose of which is to remove the difficulties with which they were compelled to grapple, and which fettered and impeded their course; on the contrary, they would have hailed such a day as the present gladly. Would the poets, think you, have winged a lower

flight if they had possessed the invaluable privilege of access to the master-spirits of poetry? or the philosophers have discovered fewer truths, if perfect machines had been at hand to assist their researches? It is, surely, a fallacy to urge, that because men *have* struggled into usefulness and fame in spite of obstacles, the clearing the pathway of genius is not a benefit. If such a principle were to prevail, the sinews of all improvement would be severed, and the advance of civilization itself would be arrested. Had such objectors lived in the first ages, they would have laboured hard to suppress the plough and the harrow, because the earth might be cultivated with the spade and the rake.

Before the assistance ministered by these societies is undervalued as unproductive, let it be considered that they have been established but a few years—that we are hardly in a situation to judge of their effects: the experiment is still in progress; and is not the prospect of the harvest worth all the tillage? In the common processes of horticulture, do we not scatter many seeds to raise a few choice flowers? And is any one prepared, is any one qualified, to say that no fruits will be ga-

thered?—that no gifted men will arise whose talents shall have been ripened by the emulation, the encouragement, and the means for improvement which such institutions hold out?—that no poet will be fostered whose verse shall add another laurel to the wreath of England—no philosopher whose acuteness of research shall bring to light some secrets of nature still hidden—some path which the vulture’s eye hath not seen—some new application of the powers of mechanism—some methods, founded upon the principles of an enlightened political economy, by which human comfort may be increased, or human misery alleviated?

But waving all hope of seeing the higher order of genius appear, are there no trophies to be won by pains-taking and industrious effort? Even chance, as it is called, may crown it. Remember that the falling of an apple led to a discovery of the law by which the planets are retained in their orbits—that galvanism owes its rise to the convulsive motions of a dead reptile, which happened to be placed within the range of an electric discharge—and that an important improvement in the steam engine was effected by a boy set to assist the work-

ing of the machine, and who, wanting to play, found a contrivance by which his personal attention could be rendered unnecessary. Where many minds are occupied in various departments of observation and study, is it wild or visionary to expect that some useful results may be accidentally attained in the busy career of multiplied inquiry? They, indeed, who feel inclined to despair of new discoveries and further improvements in knowledge, should be sent for rebuke and encouragement to trace the history of science from its first rude elements to its maturer condition. Let them read there, for instance, what chemistry was in the hands of those who raked in the ashes of the furnace for the philosopher's stone; and what it became, at a subsequent period, in those of Sir Humphrey Davy: or let them follow the track of astronomy, from the unskilled observations of the Chaldean shepherds to the profound discoveries of Kepler, Newton, Herschell, and La Place; and I am mistaken if, from such a lesson, the timid will not be cheered, and the whispered doubts of the sceptical silenced.

But allowing still further, for the sake of the argument, that these institutions are never des-

tined to extend the limits of science, or enrich England's literature, would *that* be an objection to their establishment? Do they altogether lose their value unless they educate distinguished poets and philosophers—unless they produce some splendid discovery, the fruit of well-conducted research or fortuitous experiment? Is it not enough, if we can say they are adapted to minister to the wants of man considered as an intellectual and moral agent—as endowed with reason, imagination, and memory—to provide a rational and instructive entertainment for all, but more particularly for those younger members who, having passed through the education of school, are now engaged in professions or in the business of commerce, at the most critical and dangerous season of life? Is it not enough, and more than sufficient, to say, that they are eminently calculated to nourish friendly and social feelings—to furnish a neutral ground upon which men of different habits and opinions may meet—where, meeting, they may lay aside the topics of contention, and unite together cordially in one common and praiseworthy object? I cannot but think that this last is a most important advantage, especially in times like our own, when conflicting views upon great public questions are

too apt to engender bitterness. Let, then, the contests of sectarian or political opponents be waged beyond these walls; but within them let there be no other emulation than who shall best carry forward the peaceful, but not unhonored, triumphs of learning. The strife of party may not unfitly be compared to the lightning which darts in every direction, carrying with it alarm and death; while these temples of knowledge seem destined, like conductors, to gather up the dangerous fluid, and bury it in the earth.

There is another consideration which entitles us to say, that our own locality, perhaps, is not the most inappropriate scene in which to rear a building for the promotion and diffusion of learning. Islington—I do not speak it ludicrously—may, in some measure, claim the honors of classic ground. Passing by a long series of other, and not unimportant, names in the bead-roll of talent, I may mention, there is good reason for believing that Sir Walter Raleigh, accomplished as a statesman, historian, and poet, was once an inhabitant of this vicinity: it is more clearly ascertained that here De Foe received his early education. Some of the sweetest poetry and most elegant prose of

which our literature can boast, was written by Goldsmith in one of the retired spots of this parish : here were composed those essays which, combining the humor of Rabelais with the quaint simplicity of Montaigne, have raised the name of Lamb almost to a level with that of Addison ; and here resided that profound antiquary John Nichols, who has done so much to illustrate the topography of our country and her literary history. These distinguished men have shed a lustre upon the place where they once dwelt, and we now inhabit, that seems to call upon us, not only to reverence their memories, but to support the character for ability which they have conferred. It is not for the honor of their successors that this reputation should be allowed to wither without exciting some imitation of their example, or that the torch they lighted up should be extinguished : it ought rather to be trimmed to new splendor, and, after illuminating the present, be passed forward to enlighten another generation.

I should, perhaps, apologize for the apparently argumentative, or even controversial, character which some of my previous observations may seem to wear ; but in an Address, the main drift

of which is to recommend an Association for the cultivation of letters and science, it was almost impossible to decline encountering some of the most prominent objections to such institutions, or to avoid bringing forward some of their actual and probable advantages. I willingly turn now to the plan and object of our own.

We profess, then, to assist the dissemination of literary and scientific knowledge : this is our end. The means employed are—public lectures—the more familiar and more retired instruction of classes—a museum for specimens of natural history and objects of art—apparatus for philosophical experiment—a library of reference and circulation—and monthly meetings of the members, at which written papers are read and discussed. Two subjects our rules forbid to be introduced at these meetings,—politics and religion.

The public lectures treat of selected branches of art, literature, and science—and are designed not merely to give an entertaining and popular view of them, but to excite that desire to know more, and to point out the books to be perused, and the methods to be followed, which lead to a

profounder knowledge. To public lectures are added the help of classes, in which languages and science are taught in a more familiar manner. The advantages of each mode of instruction separately are considerable, but their combination is highly improving. They serve to impress vividly upon the student's memory the elements of knowledge—keep alive his attention—stimulate his inquiries—and relieve the monotony of private study.

With the *Museum*, most of my audience are, no doubt, familiar: it is a collection which, through the kindness of our friends, is likely to be a large as it is already an extremely valuable one; and here I cannot but think it a tribute due to those gentlemen who have undertaken the task, to add that it is now gradually assuming, through their skill and exertions, a systematic arrangement, highly favorable, indeed essential, to the study of natural history. Of that study, perhaps, I may be allowed to say, that it is, in my opinion, scarcely estimated to the degree which its merits and usefulness demand. The objects about which it is conversant, divided into what have been called the three kingdoms of nature, are innumerable, of consummate beauty, and exhibit in such as

possess life, an endless variety of habits and functions exquisitely adapted to the purposes for which they were formed. In the observation of these, a fruitful source of pleasure is presented—one in which every person so disposed can participate, and thereby contribute his share to the advancement of science. In whatever clime the observer may happen to be placed, specimens abound : the collection and examination of these call for no greater dexterity or scientific attainment than may be commanded by ordinary abilities and attention ; while the incidental as well as the direct advantages are most important. Besides the indulgence of a rational and laudable curiosity, nowhere can clearer evidences be seen of the wisdom, power, and goodness of the Creator—nowhere more striking lessons gathered than from the various transitions of plants and animals from decay to life—from existence back again to decay. We know that the quickening of the sown wheat has been employed to illustrate the resurrection of the body ; and is it fanciful to suppose, that the mutations observable in animated nature—the changes, for instance, which the butterfly undergoes, may serve as a monitory lesson of man's own mutability, and

at the same time an intimation full of hope to one who is said to “fade before the moth”?

To the student of the English language and literature, our library, containing already about 3000 volumes, and rapidly increasing, offers a rich mine of intellectual gratification, and worthy to be diligently explored; for without dilating upon, but, at the same time, far from undervaluing, the writers of Greece and Rome, we can point with patriotic exultation to the authors of our own country, and especially to those who flourished in the reigns of the last Tudor and of the Stuarts, as well qualified to contest the palm of superiority with nations however eminent for literary genius. This theme, indeed, is most inviting; but, circumscribed as my limits are, I can pursue it no further than to say, that the poets of Britain, ranging from Chaucer to Wordsworth—her prose writers, extending from Hooker to Scott—her orators, from Lord Strafford to Canning—her philosophers, from Bacon to Chalmers, present a varied and unrivalled display of whatever is profound in thought, beautiful in imagery, lofty in sentiment, pure, perspicuous, and elegant in expression.

From the experience we have had since the formation of the society, I am disposed to think that our monthly meetings will become a distinguished, as they are calculated to be a very useful, part of our main design; and more especially since such extended accommodation for holding them is here thrown open to us. They offer advantages to the younger members which can hardly be overrated. I mean the opportunities of acquiring, or of improving by exercise, the arts of speaking and writing. Can it be necessary to enlarge upon the importance of some skill in rhetoric and composition, in a day when so many circumstances render them almost essential accomplishments—when the man who is unable, in some fair degree, occasionally to explain and assert his own rights, or advocate those of his fellow-men, must not only lose multiplied occasions of doing good, even in the ordinary transactions of life, but, in more public concerns, must abandon to others the duties of a citizen?

To the art of public speaking, rules are comparatively of small service; almost every thing depends upon example and use. I do not say, that treatises of eloquence are without their value;

out there is more of oratory to be learned from the orations of Cicero than from all his rhetorical works. One of the most eminent speakers that ever entered the British House of Commons was so sensible of the great importance of practice in this art, that, though an excellent scholar, and perfectly qualified to avail himself of all the theory to be learned from the pages of Aristotle and Quintilian, when he became a senator, his method of fitting himself for debate was by resolving, and making it his custom, to speak on every important subject that came before the house. Let it not be supposed, that what is held out here is the acquisition of a flippant style of speaking—a presumptuous or conceited address—the voluble utterance of words uninformed by thought : far less are we sanguine enough to expect that our discipline is to produce such speakers as the Greek orators,

Whose resistless eloquence
Wielded at will the fierce democracy,
Shook th' arsenal, and fulmin'd over Greece,
To Macedon and Artaxerxes' throne*.

But in the wide interval between powers like these and total inability, is it unreasonable to look

* *Paradise Regained*, B. iv, 268.

for the acquisition of a plain and manly habit of expressing opinion, and the banishment of that excessive and painful bashfulness which stifles thought, and makes the inexperienced speaker start at the sound of his own voice ?

Another advantage, to which I referred is the habit of literary composition ; and this exercise is to be recommended and encouraged not only because it is calculated to give an easy and fluent style—the power of neat or elegant expression—I look beyond this : it seems to expand and invigorate *thought*. It may be doubted, indeed, whether any man, however large his intellectual range—ever surveyed a subject of thought, or grappled with its difficulties, or spanned its dimensions with any considerable degree of accuracy, until he sat down to write upon it. Our first impressions are commonly indistinct, often erroneous ; and it is only by repeated efforts that we trace the outline, and quarry out the thought, and correct the faults of a rapid and illogical glance. We are too apt to be satisfied with hasty views ; but when we attempt to reason upon them—to expound them to others—to clothe them in language—the mind engages in an effort of the

most bracing and beneficial kind ; and the result generally is, that what before floated loosely in the expanse of intellectual vision, becomes concentrated, and stamped with the lineaments of truth.

I have mentioned, that there are two subjects, politics and religion, upon which no papers are received and no discussions allowed. The propriety of passing over politics will be at once obvious to those who know—and who does not?—the *ticklish* and inflammatory nature of this topic. How few persons are altogether agreed, even upon the best form of government ? What contrariety of opinion exists respecting the national measures from time to time proper to be adopted ! Again, a wider difference still is remarkable in the estimate formed of public men—of their conduct—their motives—their qualification for power. And when it is considered, that disputes on these and similar points are commonly carried on with a vehemence which too often degenerates into animosity, it will be admitted that, to introduce the varying and exciting questions of politics into the discussions of this society, would be certainly to hazard its tranquility, perhaps to endanger its existence.

The other and still more important subject we exclude, not from indifference or disrespect—far otherwise!—from feelings of reverence and awe. It was deemed, and I cannot but think rightly deemed, that this was not the arena upon which the momentous truths of religion should be canvassed—that difference of opinion might generate unseemly warmth : it was apprehended there might be danger that subjects so sacred might be desecrated by a light, an imperfect, or a mistaken discussion of them. In this place, moreover, we profess to deal only with human science and literature ; and reverently surrender the inculcation of religious principle, and the enforcement of religious conduct, to the public teachers of the Gospel—the instruction of the family—the secluded study and devotion of the closet. I am induced to make these remarks, because I am inclined to believe that our caution on this very subject was misunderstood, and threw something of a cloud over our early prospects : perhaps the misapprehension then entertained may still linger in some minds. Here, therefore, let it be understood, that the object of those with whom the Society originated, and the praise bestowed in this Address upon human knowledge, have not been to elevate that knowledge

above its due position : for although we assert its value in the concerns of life, and attribute to its salutary influence a large measure of the comforts and advantages by which we are surrounded, and ascribe to it the pleasures derived to the mind from the exercise of its powers in scientific research and literary occupation ; and, further, although we contend, that from the study of Nature's laws a natural theology may be gathered, which discovers an adumbration, at least, of the being and attributes of Him who poised the planets and sustains the world,—yet, for His true character—for our responsibility, our duties, and the foundations of hope and fear after earthly shadows shall have passed away—we look alone to *Revelation* : her voice we acknowledge to be paramount ; and before her awful sanctions the searching faculties of man, his lofty aspirings after knowledge, and the treasured wisdom of generations, must sink among agencies immeasurably subordinate and inferior.

And now, if I have at all succeeded in explaining, by a brief and, I am conscious, a very imperfect exposition, some of the benefits which may fairly be expected from the cultivation of know-

ledge, and from this Institution, it only remains for me to urge upon the younger part of my audience the importance of making those benefits available to their own improvement. Permit me, then, to suggest, with no unfriendly voice, that in the journey of life, to you now opening, you will assuredly find occasion for all the helps—and they are many—which knowledge and settled principles of action can bestow; but the season for acquiring these is the period of youth. Let the tide, then, be taken at the flood—it leads on, if not to fortune, to usefulness and honor. Allow me to remind you, that the grand secret of all improvement is diligence—the master principle of all accomplishment is economy of time: before the one, obstacle and difficulty lie prostrate—with the other, the busiest life affords abundant opportunities of leisure. Guard, then, I beseech you, against the first approaches of an inactive spirit—against the frittering away of UNRETURNING TIME in pursuits, of which the least evil that can be pronounced of them is, that they are grovelling and frivolous. It is beneath the *solitary* lamp—not in the glitter of fashionable assemblies—that the student becomes learned—becomes qualified to stamp upon his own times and posterity the

impress of genius ; at all events, becomes fitted for a life of manly action and respectability. Let me urge upon you, therefore, with an earnestness proportioned to my own deep sense of their importance, the labor, the wise perseverance, the unwearied use of means which are to secure such inestimable advantages, and which are nowhere better enforced than in the language of a Roman historian* :—*Vigilando, agendo, bene consulendo, prospere omnia cedunt ; ubi secordiae tete atque ignaviae tradideris, nequidquam Deos implores ; irati infestique sunt.*”

Having already trespassed too long, I fear, upon your attention, I will detain you no longer. I will but ask you to unite with me in an ardent aspiration for the success of this Institution—in the expression of a hope, that it may long flourish, for the promotion equally of intellectual ability and moral culture ;—that these walls, whose erection we now commemorate, may never resound to the teaching of that philosophy, falsely so called, whose tendency is to mislead or corrupt ; but of that pure and genuine science which in all its discoveries is humble—in all its investigations

* Sallust, de Bello Catalin.

of Nature's wonders, pays homage to the Power from which they sprang—which refines and elevates—preparing and qualifying for the right and honorable discharge of duty here—and not thwarting the immortal, while it advances the temporal and sublunary, interests of man.







